

A Study on the Communication Effect of Promotional Activities for Time-Honored Catering Brands on the Tik Tok Platform: A Case Study of "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982"

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Abstract

Nowadays, short video platforms have rapidly become a key battleground for brand marketing due to their efficient information dissemination and strong interactivity. Tik Tok, one of the most representative short video platforms in China, has developed into a core channel for brand promotion, leveraging over 700 million daily active users and precise algorithm recommendations. However, traditional time-honored catering brands face challenges in digital communication, including brand aging, limited communication pathways, and difficulty connecting with younger audiences. In this context, this study analyzes the communication effect of the "Hundred Years of Dehe – A Look Back at 1982" promotional activity for the time-honored brand "Dehe" on Tik Tok. Based on the Two-Step Flow Theory, opinion leaders are classified into three levels: small, medium, and large. Core indicators: like rate, comment rate, and share rate are extracted through tag filtering, and a weighted scoring method is applied to quantify communication effectiveness. Results are visually presented to compare the performance of each level. Findings indicate that communication through opinion leaders significantly outperforms brand-initiated communication, with small opinion leaders achieving the highest comment and share rates. The study concludes that time-honored brands should prioritize collaborations with small opinion leaders to better integrate cultural heritage and digital dissemination.

Keywords

Tik Tok Two-Step Flow Theory; Brand Communication; Time-Honored Catering Brands; Digital Communication; Opinion Leaders.

1. Introduction

This present study is based on the Two-Step Flow Theory, exploring the digital communication effectiveness and optimization strategies of traditional time-honored catering brands on the Tik Tok platform. As China's largest short video platform, Tik Tok has become a core channel for brand communication due to its precise algorithm recommendations and strong interactive features, especially among young users. Tik Tok not only rapidly expands the reach of brand content through short videos but also amplifies the depth and breadth of information dissemination through user likes, comments, and shares. This highly interactive communication model offers unprecedented opportunities for brands but also presents new challenges, particularly for time-honored catering brands. How to rejuvenate brand vitality in the digital communication environment of Tik Tok and strike a balance between cultural heritage and attracting young consumers has become a critical research topic.

Time-honored catering brands are important carriers of Chinese traditional culture, with their core values reflected in their profound historical accumulation and regional characteristics. Nonetheless, with the rise of digital communication, the traditional promotion methods of these

brands are often limited to one-way output, making it difficult to meet the high interactivity and diverse content demands of Tik Tok users. This limitation has led to a gradual decline in the recognition of time-honored brands in the short video era, with the issue of brand aging becoming increasingly prominent. Meanwhile, existing research shows that the brand communication logic of the Tik Tok platform aligns closely with the Two-Step Flow Theory. The Two-Step Flow Theory emphasizes the mediating role of opinion leaders in selectively processing and re-disseminating information to the audience. On the Tik Tok platform, bloggers deeply interpret and personally recreate brand information through content creation, enhancing the communicability of information through short videos, while strengthening audience awareness and attitudes towards the brand through interactive mechanisms, thereby achieving efficient diffusion of brand culture. However, there is still a significant gap in research on how to utilize opinion leaders at different levels to optimize communication paths, especially in the specific application within time-honored catering brands.

As a representative of China's time-honored food brands, "Dehe Canned Food" is renowned for its long history and traditional craftsmanship, serving as an important symbol of Yunnan's culinary culture. However, in the era of short video communication, the brand faces the core challenge of balancing cultural heritage with modern communication needs. The "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" campaign is an online promotion activity launched by the Dehe brand on the Tik Tok platform, aiming to celebrate the brand's centennial history and connect with the younger generation through innovative communication methods. The core theme of the campaign, "Retro 1982," combines the brand's history with modern communication, using Tik Tok short videos to narrate the development journey of the Dehe brand since its establishment in 1903. Based on creative videos, user interactions, and topic challenges, the campaign invites users to participate in the activity, promoting the dissemination of the brand's story.

This study uses the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" event as a case study to innovatively explore the communication mechanisms of traditional time-honored catering brands on short video platforms, integrating the two-step flow theory and the characteristics of communication on Tik Tok. It focuses on analyzing the differences in effectiveness between brand-driven communication and opinion leader-driven two-step flow communication, revealing the impact of different communication pathways on brand promotion. The research systematically evaluates the roles of various levels of opinion leaders (small, medium, and large) in the promotional activity by segmenting them and incorporating core communication indicators such as like rates, comment rates, and share rates. Utilizing a label-driven data collection method, relevant content on the Tik Tok platform is precisely filtered, and a weighted scoring method is applied to quantify the communication effects. Ultimately, the findings are visually presented through stacked graphs and bar charts, providing empirical support for optimizing marketing strategies for time-honored brands on short video platforms, while also exploring more efficient communication pathways for cultural heritage and brand rejuvenation.

2. Theoretical framework

This study employs the Two-Step Flow Theory as its theoretical framework. Proposed by Lazarsfeld and colleagues in their seminal 1948 research, this theory is regarded as a significant milestone in the field of communication studies. The Two-Step Flow Theory posits that the dissemination of information does not occur directly from the media to the masses but is accomplished through two stages. In the first stage, information is transmitted from the source, such as the brand or media, to opinion leaders. In the second stage, these opinion leaders interpret, process, and then disseminate the information, spreading it to a broader audience. Lazarsfeld and colleagues emphasized that opinion leaders are not only primary recipients of

information but also crucial intermediaries in the communication pathway, exerting significant influence on the selection, processing, and direction of information dissemination. This theory has been widely cited and validated in communication research, with Katz further developing it in 1957 to reveal the pivotal role of opinion leaders in influencing social behavior and decision-making[1]. [1]

In this study, the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" campaign organized by the Dehe brand is considered the information source. This information is precisely pushed to opinion leaders, namely prominent bloggers on the Tik Tok platform, as well as to ordinary users, through the platform's algorithm recommendations and tag aggregation functions. Opinion leaders, leveraging their social influence and content creation capabilities, reprocess and distribute the brand information, presenting the brand content in a more relatable and interactive manner to their followers. Ultimately, the audience completes the communication loop through actions such as liking, commenting, and sharing, further validating the applicability of the Two-Step Flow Theory in the context of short video platforms.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research hypothesis

The overall communication effect of spontaneous communication by the brand during the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" activity on the Tik Tok platform is superior to that of the two-step flow communication.

3.2. Division of Opinion Leader Levels

This study innovatively classifies opinion leaders involved in the two-step flow communication pathways of the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" promotional activity into three categories based on their follower counts: Micro-opinion leaders with 15,000 to 50,000 followers; Mid-tier opinion leaders with 50,000 to 200,000 followers; Macro-opinion leaders with over 200,000 followers. This classification aligns with existing research methods for categorizing opinion leaders while incorporating the unique characteristics of social media platform communication. In 2021, Dan Juan and Song Qianqian pointed out in the journal *Shanghai Management Science* that the number of followers an opinion leader has has a significant positive impact on brand reputation; the more followers they have, the stronger their potential for opinion leadership [2]. In addition, Yang Changchun and others emphasized in a 2014 study in the journal *Information Studies* that the size of the follower base is one of the key factors in assessing the communication ability of opinion leaders, which directly determines their core position in the diffusion of online information [3]. Furthermore, Dong Ye Hanbing classified online influential figures on the Weibo platform into various types, including field leaders, "grassroots opinion leaders," and official accounts of enterprises and institutions, emphasizing the differential impact of opinion leader types on communication effectiveness [4]. [4] These studies provide important theoretical support for the classification standards of this research, validating the scientific and feasible basis of tiered classification based on follower count.

3.3. Tag-Driven Data Collection Method

This study employs a Tag-Driven Data Collection method to ensure the specificity and relevance of the data. By searching for tags and keywords related to the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" promotional activity on the Tik Tok platform, such as ("#HundredYearsDehe"), ("#LookBack1982"), ("#DehePromotion"), ("#DeheSprite"), a total of 12 small opinion leaders, 12 mid-tier opinion leaders, and 4 macro-opinion leaders who posted relevant videos were selected and their associated videos' like counts, comment counts, and share counts were collected. The Tag-Driven Data Collection method takes advantage of the aggregation effect of

tags and the precise recommendation functions of Tik Tok's algorithm to effectively reduce interference from redundant information, ensuring high relevance of the data.

3.4. Weighted Scoring Method

This study adopts a Weighted Scoring Method (WSM) to evaluate the overall communication effectiveness of time-honored catering brands on the Tik Tok platform. WSM originates from Multi-Attribute Decision Making (MADM) theory, which assigns specific weights to different indicators, allowing for a comprehensive calculation of scores for each indicator to reflect overall communication effectiveness. Wu Jianmin proposed a comprehensive weighted scoring method in his research and discussed its application in analyzing results from multi-indicator experiments, emphasizing the importance of normalization to ensure the comparability of weighted scores [5]. Additionally, Dr. Chai Junyi introduced a new method of multi-attribute decision-making, the Skyline SIR method, and explored its application in the field of university rankings, demonstrating the wide applicability of multi-attribute decision-making methods in various domains [6]. This study selects the like rate, comment rate, and share rate of videos related to the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" promotional activity as key indicators of communication effectiveness. It employs an equal-weight principle, assigning each indicator a weight of $1/3$ to calculate the comprehensive communication effectiveness score, ensuring fairness in evaluation. Compared to traditional single-indicator evaluation methods, the Weighted Scoring Method allows for a multidimensional assessment of communication effects, avoiding limitations caused by biases from single-dimensional metrics. Traditional weighted scoring methods are often limited to static indicators, lacking a dynamic capture of the characteristics of communication pathways. This study improves and optimizes traditional weighted scoring methods by integrating user behavior characteristics on the Tik Tok platform with communication theory, combining weight design with actual user interaction patterns on the platform.

3.5. Data Visualization

In terms of data presentation, this study employs stacked bar charts and bar charts as the primary visualization tools to clearly and intuitively display the comprehensive communication effectiveness scores and their dimensional composition. These tools not only deconstruct complex data structures, revealing the internal relationships among the three metrics, but also enhance the overall differences in communication effectiveness through intuitive height comparisons. This visualization method is particularly suitable for the multidimensional analysis needs of different communication paths in this study.

4. Research Results

In terms of data presentation, stacked bar charts are used to show the distribution of the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" campaign across different communication paths in terms of like rate, comment rate, and share rate, as shown in Figure 1. Besides, bar charts are used to visually compare the comprehensive communication effectiveness scores of different communication paths, as shown in Figure 2.

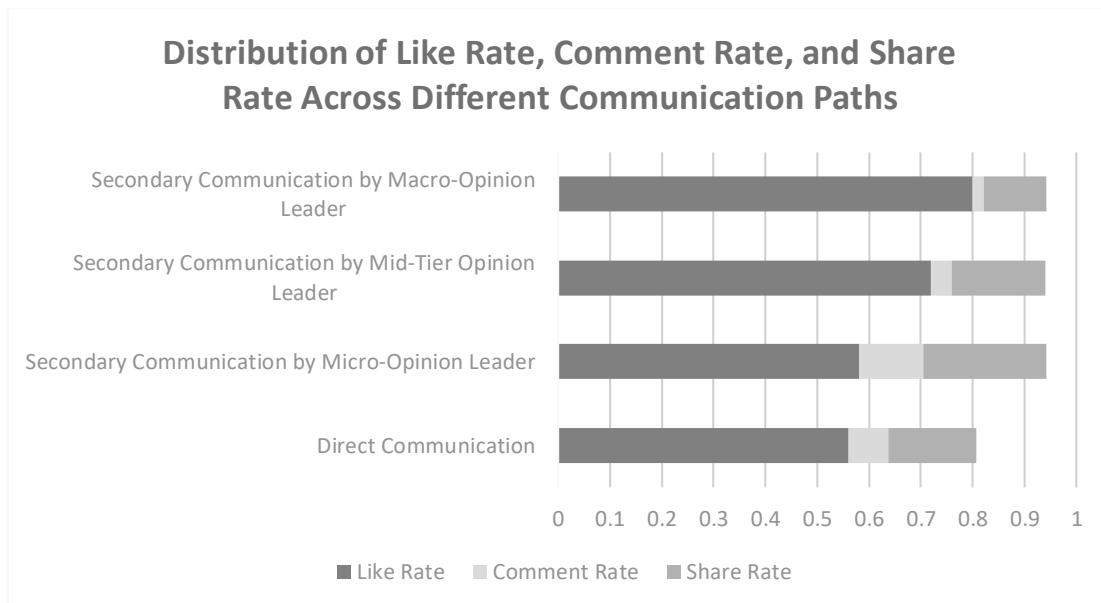


Figure 1

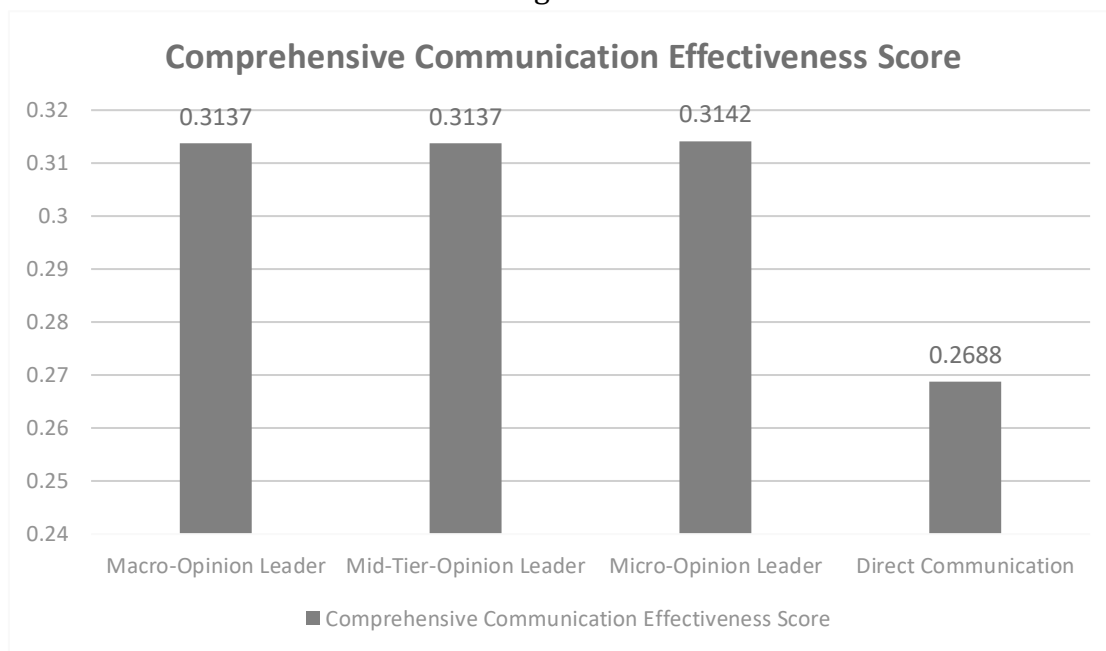


Figure 2

Based on the data calculations, the total interaction volume for the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" campaign is 248, with 139 likes, 19 comments, and 42 shares. The like rate is 0.5605, the comment rate is 0.0766, and the share rate is 0.1694. In the two-step communication path, the total interaction volume for low-level opinion leader communication is 1,634, with 949 likes, 201 comments, and 390 shares. The calculated like rate is 0.5808, the comment rate is 0.1230, and the share rate is 0.2387. For medium-level opinion leader communication, the total interaction volume is 7,820, with 5623 likes, 321 comments, and 1416 shares, resulting in a like rate of 0.7190, a comment rate of 0.0410, and a share rate of 0.1811. For high-level opinion leader communication, the total interaction volume is 41,253, with 32,970 likes, 938 comments, and 4,923 shares, yielding a like rate of 0.7992, a comment rate of 0.0227, and a share rate of 0.1193 (see Figure 1). Based on the equal-weighted comprehensive calculation of like rate, comment rate, and share rate, the comprehensive communication effectiveness scores for each communication path are as follows: brand-initiated communication is 0.2688, low-level opinion leader communication is 0.3142, and medium-level

and high-level opinion leader communication scores are very close, both at 0.3137 (see Figure 2).

From the perspective of comprehensive communication effectiveness scores, all types of two-step communication paths outperform brand-initiated communication, with low-level opinion leader communication achieving the highest comprehensive score of 0.3142. Further analysis of the single-dimensional like rate, comment rate, and share rate data reveals that brand-initiated communication lags behind two-step communication paths in all dimensions. For instance, the like rate for high-level opinion leader communication is 0.7992, significantly higher than the 0.5605 for brand-initiated communication, while the comment rate (0.1230) and share rate (0.2387) for low-level opinion leader communication are both significantly higher than those for brand-initiated communication (0.0766 and 0.1694, respectively). Plus, although medium-level opinion leader communication has a lower comment rate of 0.0410, its like rate (0.7190) and share rate (0.1811) still surpass those of brand-initiated communication. The research data indicate that the overall communication effectiveness of the spontaneous dissemination of the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" promotional activity on Tik Tok is significantly lower than that of the two-step flow communication pathway. This result does not support the research hypothesis that "the overall communication effect of spontaneous communication by the brand during the 'Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982' activity on the Tik Tok platform is superior to that of the two-step flow communication." On the contrary, the two-step flow pathway, particularly communication through micro-opinion leaders, exhibits higher communication efficiency.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the overall communication effectiveness of the two-step flow pathway for the "Hundred Years of Dehe - A Look Back at 1982" activity surpasses that of the one-step flow pathway, with the effect of micro-opinion leaders being the most significant. According to the Two-Step Flow Theory, opinion leaders serve as intermediaries for information, enhancing the depth and breadth of information dissemination through their social influence and relationships with followers [7]. Micro-opinion leaders demonstrate a remarkably high level of engagement, as evidenced by their comment rate (0.1230) and share rate (0.2387), which are significantly higher than those of other pathways. This suggests that they can enhance the emotional impact and participation of the communicated content through close interaction with their followers. Keller and Fay also point out that micro-opinion leaders maintain more intimate relationships with their followers [8]. In contrast, while macro-opinion leaders exhibit a high like rate of 0.7992, their comment and share rates are lower, indicating a communication pattern that is "broad in coverage but shallow in depth." According to Rogers, this may be related to the significant social distance between audiences and macro-opinion leaders, leading audiences to prefer simple likes for support rather than engaging in complex interactions [9]. The interaction effect of brand spontaneous communication is the lowest, with a comment rate (0.0766) and share rate (0.1694) that are significantly lower than those of micro-opinion leader pathways. This may be due to the lack of emotional connection in brand content and the tendency of short video platform algorithms to favor user-generated content, thereby limiting the effectiveness of spontaneous brand communication [10]. [10]

In this regard, compared to the characteristics of large influencers, who focus on extensive exposure but lack depth in interaction, micro-opinion leaders align better with the communication needs of traditional time-honored catering brands. Micro-opinion leaders possess a moderate follower base, close interaction, and authentic content, which highly resonated with the emotional connection and cultural heritage inherent in the core values of time-honored brands. The competitive advantage of time-honored brands lies in their rich

historical legacy and unique cultural connotations, while the key challenge in their dissemination is how to modernize their approach to connect with younger audiences, thereby narrowing the cultural distance. Micro-opinion leaders establish strong trust with their followers through personalized narratives and content creation that resonates with everyday life. They have the ability to naturally and amiably integrate the traditional values of the brand into the communication content, making them the preferred collaboration partners for promoting time-honored catering brands.

This study suggests that established catering brands should consider prioritizing long-term collaborations with small opinion leaders in their promotional activities on short video platforms, rather than blindly pursuing partnerships with large opinion leaders. The high interactivity of small opinion leaders gives them a significant advantage in terms of communication depth and emotional connection. Specifically, brands could plan deeply participatory content, such as inviting small opinion leaders to engage in the process of preparing traditional dishes or exploring the brand's historical culture, and authentically present their experiences through short videos. This type of content not only brings the brand closer to the audience in a relatable manner but also highlights the cultural characteristics of the brand, effectively enhancing the target audience's emotional connection with it. Moreover, the high interactivity of small opinion leaders provides important support for the brand to create a deep communication chain. In this regard, brands could design thematic activities, such as "Tastes of Hometown Memories" or "Intangible Cultural Heritage Food Experience," encouraging small opinion leaders to share personal stories related to the brand and guiding fans to interact in the comments section by sharing their relevant memories. This communication model, driven by emotional resonance, can reinforce the brand's cultural identity while creating a highly engaged communication loop that further amplifies the communication effects. Based upon these strategies, established brands can precisely align with the communication characteristics of small opinion leaders, effectively combining the brand's cultural heritage with market promotion, thus achieving a more efficient and targeted communication pathway in modern short video platforms.

Nonetheless, this study has certain limitations in the analysis of secondary communication pathways, specifically in its insufficient exploration of the dynamic influence of the recommendation algorithm on the Tik Tok platform. The recommendation mechanism of Tik Tok heavily relies on user interaction data—likes, comments, and shares; content visibility may be temporarily amplified due to a high like rate, while insufficient comment and share rates could hinder the content's sustained recommendation effects. This dynamic adjustment mechanism means that the effectiveness of different communication paths is not fixed but varies according to the algorithm's push strategy. Future research could incorporate time series analyses or dynamic weighting models to comprehensively reveal the moderating role of algorithms in the effectiveness of communication pathways.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that small-scale opinion leaders demonstrate greater interaction depth and communication efficiency in promoting established catering brands, significantly outperforming both spontaneous brand communication and large-scale opinion leaders, particularly in terms of comment and share rates. This suggests that small-scale opinion leaders, through authentic and relatable content, forge stronger emotional connections with their audience, effectively driving user engagement and interaction. To this end, catering brands should prioritize collaborations with small-scale opinion leaders in their short video platform campaigns, crafting content that is highly interactive and culturally distinctive to deepen the communication of brand culture and enhance market appeal. By integrating the Two-Step Flow

Theory with the dynamic communication features of short video platforms, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of the dual role of opinion leaders in cultural dissemination and market promotion. The findings not only expand the application of the two-step flow theory in digital contexts but also uncover the varying contributions of different levels of opinion leaders in enhancing information dissemination depth and cultural value expansion. These insights provide a robust theoretical framework and empirical foundation for optimizing the communication strategies of traditional brands in the digital era. Future research could further integrate audience behavior data with the algorithmic mechanisms of short video platforms, extending the analysis to other platforms or brand categories. This would help uncover broader communication patterns and offer more precise guidance for the cultural preservation and market expansion of traditional brands in the digital age.

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